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ABSTRACT

An array of qualities exists that distinguish the schools of Canada. Three qualities that constitute achievement are discussed in this paper. First, schools have generally acquired a place of high regard in the eyes of the public. Second, this country has built a teaching corps the quality of which is unmatched in the English-speaking world. Third, there has been a "Great Leap Forward" in instructional research where emphasis is on systematic instruction in study skills, the establishment of curriculum priorities, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, monitored homework, prerequisite enrichment, setting of high expectations, and active learning. Lastly, the paper provides a discussion of the use of various unrealized resources: professional, community, students, and human experience. (SI)

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CURRICULUM: PAST ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

CURRICULUM AT THE CENTER

CANADIAN EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATON. MONTREAL. 1 MAY 1989

DAVID PRATT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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The Artist

One evening there came into his soul the desire to fashion an image of The Pleasure that Abideth for a Moment. And he went forth into the world to look for bronze. For he could only think in bronze.

But all the bronze of the whole world had disappeared, nor anywhere in the whole world was there any bronze to be found, save only the bronze of the image of The Sorrow that Endureth for Ever.

Now this image he had himself, and with his own hands, fashioned, and had set it on the tomb of the one thing he had loved in life. On the tomb of the dead thing he had most loved had he set this image of his own fashioning, that it might serve as a sign of the love that dieth not, and a symbol of the sorrow that endureth for ever. And in the whole world there was no other bronze save the bronze of this image. And he took the image he had fashioned, and set it in a great furnace, and gave it to the fire.

And out of the bronze of the image of The Sorrow

that Endureth for Ever he fashioned an image of The Pleasure that Abideth for a Moment.

(Oscar Wilde)

Grounds for Optimism

I take it as axiomatic that the role of the school is to assist people to discover and to construct meaning in their lives, and that a sense of meaning is the essence of our humanity. In the words of Merleau-Ponty, "we are condemned to meaning."

What are the meanings to which our schools should be committed? Are they meanings redolent of sorrow or of pleasure? Of the individual or of the culture? Of the mind, or the spirit? This, I would aver, is the essential curriculum question. Over the past twenty years we have answered many of the questions regarding curriculum and instruction that had exercised educators for a century. We have many answers we did not have--some that we did not even dream of having--a generation ago. Some of these answers have yet to make an impact on classroom practice: that is largely a function of time. But these are essentially the answers

to little questions. It is now time to address some of the bigger questions.

Before sketching out the landscape of possibility, it is appropriate to point out that in this year of 1989 we are approaching the educational future in this country from a position of strength. The message therefore is not one of gloom but of optimism. The prospects for education, I believe, have not been better since the foundation of Plato's Academy in 385 BC. Indeed, the prospects for the world are in many ways better than they have been for decades. Conflicts that seemed to be intractable, in Afghanistan, in Angola, in Namibia, in Cyprus, in Central America, are approaching resolution. Sunlight seems to be breaking through the mushroom cloud that has hung over the consciousness of all of us since August 5 1945. These changes will bring their own set of new challenges. We are currently witnessing what Mr. Gorbachev himself calls a second Russian Revolution. If his revolution of perestroika is truly successful, the Soviet Union will eventually constitute an economic competitor for North America to add to those of the European Economic Community and South-East Asia. It will be a competitor all of whose adult citizens have behind them four or five times as

much science and technology as the average Canadian student. But far better have such a nation as an economic competitor than a military antagonist. That shift itself is a cause for hope.

Out of a large array of qualities that seem to me to distinguish the schools in this country, I would like to mention three that constitute considerable achievements realized in the past ten or fifteen years.

Schools and Self-Concept

1. First, schools have generally acquired a place of high regard in the eyes of the public. Whenever I enter schools I encounter teachers and principals who are actively concerned with the total wellbeing of their pupils. Public Opinion Polls conducted in Canada over the past five years show that the public, and particularly parents, believe that the schools are places which their children enjoy, which are challenging and exciting their children's interest in learning, and where the curriculum is better than it was when they were in school. Poll after poll shows that a large proportion of the public would be willing to pay more taxes in support of education. Poll after poll shows

that when the public is asked how much confidence it has in various public institutions, the public schools head the list--ahead of the federal, provincial, and municipal governments, ahead of the churches, and ahead of business. This is an enormous achievement, and one in which we can all take justified pride.

What these surveys indicate is a sense of gratitude on the part of the public that the schools are not only attempting to teach their children to learn, but are also helping to build a healthy self-concept. Everyone understands intuitively that people with a high self-concept are generally happy people, who tend also to make other people happy, and that those with a low self-concept are generally unhappy people, with a talent for making others miserable. We are beginning to realize in schools that to give young children ample experiences of success and achievement, to build a firm sense of efficacy and empowerment, is the best possible preparation for a lifetime that will inevitably include periods of difficulty and discouragement. This has been a theme in educational thought for a long time. In the 1920s, in a book entitled, The inner world of childhood, Frances Wickham describes an analysis of young children's self-concept through the stories they wrote.

In one case, children were asked to write a story in which they imagined they were a lost dog. One child, clearly with a low sense of efficacy, ended the story this way: "It was cold, very very cold. It was dark, very very dark. And I was lost, very very lost. There was nothing I could do about it, so I just lay down in the snow and died." Another child's story was quite different. "I felt cold white feathers falling on my nose, and it was fun, and I chased them further and further into the forest, and it got dark, and I couldn't find my master, and I was lost. So I found a hollow log and I crawled into it for the night, but it was all worth while. For that night, another little dog crawled into the other end of the log, and in the morning we had eight puppies."

Quality of Teachers

2. Secondly, we have, in this country, built a teaching corps the quality of which is unmatched in the English-speaking world. I recognize that I am speaking at this moment to a group of people, who could, had you so chosen, have become successful in law, in medicine, in business, or in politics. In our admissions process at Queen's University, as in some other faculties, we

decided some years ago that academic background alone was not an adequate basis for admitting students into a teacher education program, and that we should weigh personal background equally with academic achievement. This involves a large group of faculty and professional teachers meeting once a year to read and evaluate many hundreds of detailed written statements from applicants in which they describe their aspirations and experiences in leadership, in diverse human groups, in helping roles, in employment, and in working with children. Two things never fail to amaze me about these statements. The first is the calibre of young people today seeking to make teaching a career. The second is that, out of the 1716 statements we read this year, there appeared to be practically no weak candidates. We choose between good candidates and other good ones, and it is a matter of considerable regret that we are unable to offer places to many well qualified and promising applicants. Certainly there are still a few members of the public who are cynical about the calibre of teachers today, but I sometimes find myself agreeing with Thomas Haliburton, who said of some critics, you can't reform them, you can only chloroform them.

The educational progress made in this country in

the past twenty years places Canada at the forefront among English-speaking nations. Having had direct experience of the educational systems of five English speaking countries, I have no hesitation in saying that Canadian schools are by far the most advanced. Furthermore, we suffer from few of the social and political disasters that plague schools in such countries as the United States and Britain. Our educational success is borne out by the achievement of Canadian students in the International Studies of Educational Achievement. I believe that as a country Canada is at a point to assume a position of educational leadership in the English-speaking world. Only one thing holds us back: our inability to speak with a national voice. For a century we have used the British North America Act as a reason to maintain ten isolated educational systems. But there are many other federal systems in the world which have overcome this difficulty. India, Yugoslavia, Indonesia, West Germany, and Australia are among the countries whose constitution assigns responsibility for education to the states or provinces, but which nevertheless have developed influential federal offices of education. Canada is the only country in the world with no national office of education! We suffer particularly in terms of

curriculum. The excellent work done in different provinces in rarely shared in any systematic fashion. with each province working from scratch without benefitting from the experience of its neighbors. Though the Council of Ministers does excellent work, it is not sufficient to the tasks required in the next decades. The provinces do well acting individually, but they could do outstanding work acting collaboratively. I propose, therefore, as a first step, that the CEA commit itself, as a matter of urgent priority, to the formation of a National Curriculum Council, to act as a clearinghouse and support system for curriculum development at the provincial and local level.

The Great Leap Forward

3. The third achievement I want to mention is what I would call the Great Leap Forward in instructional research. It is becoming difficult to remember that twenty years ago the current slogan among educational researchers was "Schools make no difference", and the prevailing mood was one of defeat and despair. A dominating belief was that once a child's family background and social class had been taken into account, schools could have little additive impact--an

educational version of the doctrine of infant damnation. That conclusion was, I believe, never justified by the available evidence. Be that as it may, the situation is radically different today. We now know in considerable detail, the conditions which are necessary to bring about a high level of achievement in almost all pupils--at least in those areas traditionally valued by schools and parents, that is to say, in areas of cognition. Social class may still predict academic achievement, but many curriculum theorists would now say that a high correlation is prima facie evidence of an ineffective school. We can provide school people with a kit of tools which collectively can greatly outweigh the effects of class background. To name only a few of these, some are: systematic instruction in study skills; establishing curriculum priorities; cooperative learning; peer tutoring; regularly monitored homework; prerequisite enrichment; frequent diagnosis and remediation; setting high expectations; acceleration; and active learning.

I am suggesting that in many conventional areas of schooling, we now know both what to do and how to do it. I want now to turn to what I regard as newer challenges, as the challenges we need to face and to meet in the

twenty first century.

Future Challenges

There's a Chinese proverb: "To prophesy is very difficult, especially with regard to the future." An American diplomat named Robert Murphy, was a young vice-consul in Munich in the 1920's. One of his best friends was Monsignor Pacelli, the Apostolic Delegate to Bavaria. They used to spend evenings in some of the Munich beer halls listening to the rhetoric of a local politician named Adolf Hitler. They both agreed that Hitler was just a local rabble-rouser who would never be of much significance, and so reported to their home governments. Thirty years later, Robert Murphy had risen to be U.S. Ambassador to West Germany, and he met Monsignor Pacelli again, who by this time had become Pope Pius XII. Murphy reminded the Pope of their judgment about Adolf Hitler. "Ah" said his Holiness "that was before I became infallible."

I want to say immediately that I do not consider it part of this agenda to obtain more financial resources for education. In fact, I would maintain that the idea that we can progress only by means of greater

expenditure is one of many limiting beliefs that we hold about education and that restrict the advances we might make. As a society, Canada is already at the high end of the scale in terms of the proportion of GNP devoted to education. When we consider how many hours for how many years young people in our society are in school, what we have is an intervention by the state in the lives of individuals which is already mind-boggling in magnitude. We do not need more: we simply need to realize the resources already at our disposal.

Professional Resources

1. One resource to realize is the professional. We have outstanding teachers in this country, but we select them unimaginatively and train them somewhat briefly and casually. I do not believe that we have begun to properly employ many of the women working in our school systems. We claim to have employment equity, but we frame senior positions in such a way that they are often attractive only to people who are single, workaholics, or who can rely on a full-time homemaker. The ethos of schooling, from the hierarchical nature of authority to the rigid, task-oriented seating pattern of classrooms, reflects an essentially masculine phenomenology. The

valued emotions in school are still most often the emotions of victory, triumph, and success: explosive emotions which spring from a competitive and combative ethic: they are primal masculine emotions, whereas the emotion of joy, which is collaborative and infusive in its energy, is not accorded the same attention. I am delighted that Dr. Charol Shakeshaft is at this conference, whose book, Women in educational administration, shows us how much the schools are losing by their undervaluing of women in positions of leadership, and she will speak to these issues much more cogently than I can.

I want to put in a word for one particularly underutilized group of teachers. Retired teachers. It must be very hard after thirty years in the classroom to stop teaching cold turkey. Many retired teachers have much more to give and I believe a willingness to give. Many are still very vigorous--in Ontario we have had a retirement window you may have heard of which allows teachers to retire on full pension at about 38. I'd like to recommend something called the Homework Hotline. It works like this. Posters go up in every school in the district, saying Homework Hotline, 5.00 p.m. - 10.00 p.m. weekdays, and a phone number. Any student can call

during those hours. So a student calls, and the volunteer coordinator says "Homework Hotline, can I help you." The student says, Yes, I'm in Grade 11 Physical Geography and I don't understand this water cycle stuff. The Coordinator says, hold on, I'll connect you with our Geography specialist, and calls the retired Geography teacher who has agreed to be home to receive calls that evening. It's important that the help be there immediately when needed. The student and the teacher work over the phone until the problem is resolved. The system is very comfortable for students, because they already spend a lot of time on the phone in the evenings to their friends discussing homework, at least that is what my teenagers used to say they were discussing all evening.

We further fail to fully realize our professional resources when we deploy our teachers as autonomous and isolated individuals. A number of sociological studies have told us what many people already knew: that although in schools we work surrounded by people, teaching is often one of the loneliest professions. Many teachers spend very little time each day in coversation with colleagues, and even less time in professional dialogue. It's partly because teachers are

natural nurturers. If I were to ask you to list in your mind all the people in your life whom you nurture, the list would probably be quite lengthy. Now suppose I asked you to list the people who nurture you. I would guess that the list is somewhat shorter. We tend to be better at nurturing others than at taking care of our own needs for nurturance. And this has professional as well as personal importance. Some of the most interesting findings in the whole exciting field of school effectiveness research has to do with the collegial nature of effective schools. In one study, the staffroom conversations of teachers were recorded for several months, and then analyzed for systematic differences. Out of this mountain of data, only one significant difference emerged. In the less effective schools, the one word most commonly used by teachers was "I". In the more effective schools, the most common word was "We".

Community Resources

2. The second set of resources yet to be fully realized are community resources. A couple of years ago I completed a study of curriculum guidelines in Canada. I looked at ten guidelines from each province. Eight of

the provinces routinely listed the members of the writing committees for those guidelines and their affiliations. The average size of the provincial curriculum committees was eight. How many of those 600 committee members, do you think, were students? None. How many were on the committees by virtue of their status as parents? None. Doesn't that shock you? It certainly shocks me. There are many definitions of democracy, but they all include the idea that those affected by decisions should have the right and the opportunity to make input into those decisions. Furthermore, we rarely attempt to discover the opinions of the public either by needs assessment before curriculum is developed or by program evaluation after it is implemented. There are some honorable exceptions to these generalizations. Quebec routinely uses needs assessment in its curriculum development. A couple of years ago Saskatchewan conducted what was probably the largest educational needs assessment in Canadian history, putting a survey form into the mail box of every family in the province with school-age children: 164,000 homes in all, as well as inviting and receiving over 300 written briefs. That is grass-roots democracy in action.

There are many other ways in which the resources of the community can be more fully realized. Bringing the parents of your Grade 1 children into the school for an evening's workshop, and showing them how to work with their own children for ten minutes each evening can work wonders with early achievement. We do not use one tenth of the resources available in our senior citizens. A kindergarten teacher found this out when she asked her class to bring in their favorite thing the following day for show and tell, and one little boy brought in his 83 year old grandfather. Seniors make wonderful tutors, and they bring a refreshing diversity to our age-segregated communities and age-segregated schools. And then there are all the other people in the community who would help us but have never been asked.

Student Resources

3. The third resource I have in mind is students themselves. Through the great work of people like David and Roger Johnson and Robert Slavin we are beginning to realize how much more effective is cooperative learning than individual or competitive learning. I have a hypothesis that we acquire truly important learnings only in the context of a significant human relationship.

I used to believe that competition was one legitimate instructional strategy. Certainly it seems to work in business and in sport. But there is a world of difference between competition that is elective and competition that is compulsory. Coercing pupils into competition, I now believe, is a form of violence. And apart from anything else, it simply is not as effective as cooperative learning. Furthermore, despite the protestations of Chambers of Commerce, I'm not sure it is totally relevant in business. Whenever I ask executives what qualities they value most in new employees, the answer is teamwork. And a breakdown in human relations is the major cause of terminations, accounting for over 60% of all firings. So it would seem that cooperation is in fact the primary vocational skill. Of course some people are going to oppose this idea, but as Enrico Fermi said, the only way you can overcome opposition to a new idea is to wait for the opponents to die out.

Cooperation goes further than that. Peer tutoring, especially cross-age peer tutoring, is undoubtedly one of the most cost-effective ways of raising pupil achievement. In some schools, every child on entry to school is teamed up with a buddy three or four years

older, who acts as a tutor on a regular basis. This not only helps both pupils academically, it also greatly improves the atmosphere in the school and the school yard. In an experiment at the University of Warwick in England, chronic truants, who were in juvenile court for truancy, were asked to tutor younger children. The truancy disappeared immediately, completely, and for ever. Those teenagers would never miss their appointment with the child they were tutoring. They would come to school through snowstorms. They would come to school when they were sick. They would come to school when they were supposed to be in court. Every high school within walking distance of an elementary school could set up a tutoring program, in which selected and trained students tutor elementary children on a regular basis. They don't need to be paid; the promise of a letter of recommendation to future employers seems to be an acceptable reward. It is also one way of allowing some young people to discover that they have a vocation for teaching.

It is an irony that in schools we work surrounded by other people, and yet we often continue to use strategies that leave both teachers and students isolated and lonely. We have not yet begun fully to

realize the dynamic that exists when people commit themselves to a collaborative task. What I am trying to say was said much better years ago by Teilhard de Chardin: "One day, after we have mastered the winds, the waves, the tides, and gravity, we will harness the energies of love. Then for the second time in the history of the world, we shall have discovered fire."

I am urging that we pay attention to the fact that young people are social beings. They do not simply have brains; they also have bodies, and genders, and friends, and souls. So long as we honor only intellectual achievement, we will frame the purposes of education in terms of developing people's minds. But I would prefer a much different goal for education in this country; I would argue that the function of education is to help and to inspire people to make of their lives a moral achievement. It is a moral achievement when we move from ignorance to knowledge, or from knowledge to wisdom. But it is also a moral achievement when we grow from egocentrism to compassion, or from dependency to autonomy, or from complacency to inspiration, or from conformity to authenticity.

None of the resources I've mentioned requires

additional expenditure of educational funds, and nor does the last. Booker T. Washington, the great black American leader, used to tell a story about a ship becalmed in the Gulf of Mexico. It signalled to a passing vessel that it had run out of fresh water, and would they stop and provide an emergency supply. The inexplicable message that came back was, "Let down your bucket where you are." They figured their message had been misunderstood, and repeated the signal, and received the same reply, and the third time the same reply again. A sailor threw a bucket overboard on a rope and pulled it up and sure enough, the water was fresh. The outflow of fresh water from the Mississippi was so great that it flowed for miles over the horizon into the Gulf of Mexico. Just so, I think we must let down our bucket where we are, and realize the resources already available to us.

Human Experience

And so the last of these four resources is simply the resource of human experience. As I said earlier, we have now discovered many ways in which we can enhance cognitive achievement. The challenge of the next decades is to find out how we can enhance the more deep-seated

and more significant human capacities: the orientations, the values, self-concept. This area of enquiry is still in its infancy. I know of no school nutrition curriculum which has been shown actually to change people's diets. I know of no school anti-smoking program which has been shown to actually change students' smoking. I know of no driver education program which actually reduces accidents. Students will say all the right things after the tobacco curriculum, but saliva tests show that they smoking has not changed. Insurance companies give discounts to graduates of driver education programs not because they have become more responsible drivers, but because it is the more responsible students who take driver education. We must continue to endeavor to work in these areas, but as yet we have not made the kind of breakthroughs we have made in cognition. But there are some emerging possibilities. We know that attitudes cannot be changed by exhortation, by preaching, by hectoring and lecturing. But they can be changed by experience. We have yet to recognize in schools that life is about experiences, not cognitions. You don't find many references to experience in curricula. You find even fewer to fun. You can't do things for fun in school. I recall a cartoon of two kindergarten children looking at

a rabbit on the teacher's desk and one says to the other, Don't touch the rabbit, or teacher will make you write a report on it." But we do know that people learn best through experience. If you want your graduates to be active participants in the political process, insist that they work as canvassers, poll captains, and scrutineers in elections. If you want to improve students' attitudes to the police, have them share a shift with a police officer.

I want to explore a specific example with you. Many of our environmental education curricula seem to me to be misdirected. They present students with the environmental horrorshow of acid rain, ozone depletion, the greenhouse effect, and contamination by radioactivity, PCBs and dioxyns. They then give students absolutely no means of contributing in any serious way to any kind of solution. This may in fact be worse than useless, because all it will do is build alienation and disempowerment. Our task in education is not to disempower but to empower. But what can we do? The rain forests throughout the world are being cut and burned for reasons that are deeply rooted in unjust economic and political relations. But as Camus said, in his essay on Resistance, rebellion, and death: "I and a

few others know what must be done, if not to reduce ell, at leat not to add to it. Perhaps we cannot prevent this world from being a world in which children are tortured. But we can reduce the number of tortured children."

So I have a proposal. Let's revive Arbor Day. "The general regulations prescribe as follows" reads the 1887 regulation by the Ontario Department of Education. "The first Friday in May should be set apart by the trustees of every rural school and incorporated village for the purpose of planting shade trees, making flower beds and otherwise improving and beautifying the school grounds." Arbor Day was first introduced in Nebraska in 1872, in response to the desertification of large parts of the state due to deforestation mainly by mining companies. We are facing the same problem today, but on a global scale. All we need is one day a year, seedlings from the Ministries of Lands and Forests, and some picks and shovels. And every kid plants trees. In Nebraska, on the first Arbor Day, one million trees were planted. So suppose that each group of 4 children plants 100 trees each Arbor Day and half of them survive. In 10 years, each child has added 50 trees. A community with 1000 students has added 50,000 trees. If all the

schools in Canada participated, we'd add 150 million trees a year. It doesn't matter where in the world the trees are planted, they will play their role in the carbon-oxygen exchange. Each hectare of pine trees planted will absorb 10 tons of carbon per year. But more importantly, we have then done something, something positive and physical and undeniable, to change the world. We have spent a day in the sunshine; we have blisters on our hands and earth under our fingernails, but we are involved. Like writing a poem or giving birth to a child, planting a tree is an affirmation of life and hence an antidote to despair.

The Human Spirit

And having said this, I feel impelled to add, that when we talk of experience, we are talking not simply of the mind, but of the human spirit. We are unduly nervous in public education of talking about spirituality, perhaps because we confuse it with religion. That area of spirituality known as aesthetics suffers enormously in schools from the academic disease of cognitive reductionism. You can read many a curriculum in literature, music, or visual arts without encountering acknowledgement that these are areas of

intrinsically valuable and aesthetic experience. Literature becomes reduced to a mode of communication, poetry to a branch of mathematics. It is not only the arts which suffer. How can we teach a materialistic science, when physicists and mystics now speak in virtually the same language? The work of physicists like Stephen Hawking force us to ponder such theories as the Big Bang Theory of the universe. As we roll the film of the evolving universe backwards, the stars move back toward a central point. Then they begin to coalesce in one huge fireball. Roll the film further back, to a thousandth of a second after the big bang, and all of the matter now existing in the universe is compressed into a single star of enormous density. Every atom now existing in the universe was part of that star. Every atom in each of our bodies was once part of a star. We are all, literally, star children.

Learning for mastery is important. I think we need also to learn for mystery.

I was asked by the organizers of this conference to incorporate into my remarks three questions for discussion. Here they are: 1. What are our limiting beliefs about schooling? 2. What are the first steps in

moving beyond the image of the learner as disembodied brain? 3. How can schools become places that nourish the human spirit?

I must bring these remarks to a close, and I'm reminded at this point of the country preacher who tested the patience of his congregation beyond endurance by the length of his sermons. One day, at the end of an exceptionally lengthy and tedious address, he said, My friends, I have some sad news for you today. I shall be leaving you soon. Starting next month, the Lord Jesus has called me to serve in a new parish. And as one person, the congregation stood and sang, What a friend we have in Jesus.

We can all remember the schools of twenty years ago. I can remember a school of forty five years ago, which I entered the day after my fourth birthday during world war two. I remember the gas mask I had to carry to school every day, with its face like Donald Duck. I remember the feelings of dread and relief during air raids. The relief occurred when the air raid siren went and we could abandon the lesson and crawl under our desks, for all too short a time until the All Clear sounded. Our schools have made enormous strides since

then, which we do well to celebrate. I believe they can change even more profoundly over the next thirty years. The vision I have is of schools in which the primary mode of learning is experience, in which the preferred vehicle is human relationships, in which the pervading emotion is joy, and in which all those who dwell in schools share the commitment to help one another make of their lives a moral achievement.